ANTHROPOLOGY AND ADMINISTRATION

THE importance of anthropological study in relation to the right government of native races is receiving increased recognition. We pride ourselves on the even-handed justice of our administration, but we are gradually coming to see that, admirable as our intentions may be, such justice is impossible without some understanding of and sympathy with the customs and feelings of the governed. Mr. H. Ling Roth well remarked, some years ago (see *Great Benin*, App. IV.): "Politically, it is of the first importance that our governing officials should have a thorough knowledge of the native races subject to them—and this is the knowledge that anthropology can give them—for such knowledge can teach what methods of government and what forms of taxation are most suited to the particular tribes or to the stage of civilisation in which we find them. In connection with this, there can be no doubt that, with adequate knowledge, much bloodshed could have been saved in the past, both on our frontiers and in our colonies." We are glad to welcome in the volumes before us[1] two efforts towards the realisation of this ideal, made by men who, to many years' experience of the West African native, have added the other indispensable (but, unfortunately, by no means universal) qualification, *i.e.*, a willingness to learn from him, and to take some trouble to understand his mental attitude.

Neither of these books is easy reading. Mr. Dennett's fondness for esoteric speculation (already to some extent known to readers of this JOURNAL) appears to have been

[1] *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind, or Notes on the Kingly Office in West Africa.* By R. E. Dennett, Author of "Notes on the Folklore of the Fjort," &c. London. (Macmillan and Co.)

The Lower Niger and its Tribes. By Major Arthur Glyn Leonard. Same publisher.

curbed by editorial influences, but we are conscious of a want of connection in some parts which may possibly be due to the excision of "irrelevant matter" referred to in the preface. Major Leonard also betrays a certain leaning towards mysticism (with which we are far from wishing to quarrel), and conveys his meaning in a curiously involved and laboured style, which at times verges on obscurity. But both are striving to emphasise two main points, which cannot be too often or too strongly insisted on: that the *sine qua non* of a sound native policy is the understanding of the native, his language, customs, and modes of thought, and that there is a great deal in the native that is worth understanding.

Mr. Dennett's "categories" may raise a smile, especially when we come to the passage (p. 240) where he applies them to the British Constitution. But, whatever he may have read into the information supplied to him by Bavili and Bini, he appears to have got hold of some exceedingly curious fragments (perhaps all that can now be recovered) of an important body of native tradition, handed down from incalculable antiquity. It is, to say the least of it, remarkable that the six divisions of sacred symbols which Mr. Dennett has worked out among the Bavili should be traceable in a slightly different form in Benin, and it cannot be merely accidental that the formula of the Bini divining-board should correspond so closely with the arithmetical formula preserved by the Bavili in the arrangement of the pieces of matting which make up the shroud of their kings. No less remarkable is the recurrence of the number 201 in both cases. The Bini (as Mr. Dennett was told by a certain priest) were taught their religion by 201 *ebassi* (apparently a kind of nature spirits), who accompanied a banished chief when he returned to Benin City after a stay of 201 years in the Bush. With regard to the Bavili, Mr. Dennett says:—

"It seems to the writer that the complete philosophy was once given and taught to the people by means of symbols, and that 201 sacred groves were set apart as the places where the lessons in connection with this philosophy were taught."

This "philosophy of the groves," together with the associated subjects of the seasons, winds, sacred rivers, trees,

and animals, is dealt with in Chapters XI.-XV. It may sound very fanciful, but, so far as it consists of genuine native tradition, is worthy of all attention. It is possible that fragments of similar traditions may be communicated by old tribesmen to their juniors in the "mysteries" known as *unyago* among the East African Bantu, but, so far, nothing of this character appears to have reached the ears of any European.

But our concern at present is rather with the conclusions which Mr. Dennett has based on this system of native philosophy. These may best be stated in his own words:—

> "In the first place, I wish to show that, concurrent with fetishism or Jujuism, there is in Africa a religion giving us a much higher conception of God than is generally acknowledged by writers on African modes of thought. And, in the second place, I am anxious to make clear the vital importance of the kingly office to the African communities."

The first proposition, interesting as it is in itself, it is not proposed to discuss here, except by remarking that Mr. Dennett connects the decay of the kingly power (in its earlier form of a *quasi*-theocratic paternal despotism) with the falling away from a purer faith to the darker superstitions of fetishism, or, as he calls it, Ndongoism. It would seem that the kingdom of Luango, comprising the various provinces enumerated on pp. 122-3, was under the sway of one great chief, known (if officially crowned, which was not always the case) as Maniluango, or Maluango. We are reminded of various so-called "empires" which have sprung up and crumbled away again in various parts of Bantu Africa —that of the "Monomotapa," for instance, or that of Undi, north of the Zambezi, existing at a still later period. In Livingstone's time the paramount chiefs of various sections of the Anyanja (or Mañanja)—Sandia, Mpende, Mankokwe, Kangomba—were virtually independent, but they were supposed to have formerly owed allegiance to the realm of Undi. The agricultural Bantu were marked by a tendency to fall apart into local units so soon as the pressure of external circumstances, or the strong hand of the ruler whose personality had built up the kingdom, ceased to hold them together. This tendency even showed

itself, to some extent, in Basutoland, after the death of Moshesh, but has been counteracted by British rule, following out, in this case, a sounder policy than (unfortunately) it has done in some others. Only when an able ruler has secured his realm against attack from without by organising a military force (as was done by Tshaka) has that realm, in later times at least, attained any degree of stability. In this connection it may be worth while to recall a remark of Mr. H. L. Duff's (*Nyasaland under the Foreign office*, pp. 288-9) to the effect that government through the native chiefs is impossible, because none of them will undertake the responsibility.

"Once absolutely checked on their own lines of political development, these natives calmly abandon the whole business, and, while resigning supreme power to the European, take very good care not to relieve him of any part of the burden of trivial worries incidental to the situation."

Mr. Duff, unless we misread him, seems to explain this attitude as one of pique on the part of the native because the white man has deprived him of the supreme power. But this is surely a mistake. The men in question never had more than a limited local power. If they had not their own paramount chief to look to, they would expect to leave the larger concerns of the country to the white man who had taken the chief's place. It is only fair to add that, in the case of the Shire Highlands, tribal institutions had, from several causes, been so broken up as to cause a hopeless state of confusion, and no doubt it would have been impossible to reorganise them on the old lines. But we must beware of assuming too readily, and acting on the assumption, that institutions which may be merely in abeyance have perished. Mr. Dennett points out the grave mistake made by Stanley in supposing that the Kongozovo, or chiefs of districts, were in reality independent princes.

"The Kongo would have worn a very different appearance to-day had the kingdoms of Kongo, Kakongo, and Luango been resuscitated and governed on natural lines, if not as one kingdom, then as at least three 'Free States.' Nothing could have been more disastrous to the welfare of the people and the country than the absolutely insane way this country was cut up between the French, the Portuguese, and the independent

State of the Congo." (P. 32—see also p. 6; also p. 58, on the destruction of native customs entailed by the slave-trade and its abuses.)

The right government of the Bantu race—perhaps we might say of the African in general—involves a greater degree of personal rule than is compatible with our ideas, or even, it may be, than can be beneficially exercised by a European, unless he happens to be a man of somewhat special gifts and character. This is what is meant, no doubt, by observers who, like Mr. Duff, say that "the native prefers to be strongly, even autocratically, governed." But close to this truth lie two fallacies, viz., that the genuine native ruler is an absolute despot, and that the native respects force as such, whether justly or unjustly applied. Where all law is unwritten, it is not so easy to trace the action of "constitutional checks"; but they are none the less real, and the apparent autocracy of a native chief consists in his influence being such as to carry his people with him in any given course. (This, of course, only applies to cases where the balance is not upset by outside interference.) As to the keen sense of justice possessed by natives, all thoughtful observers are agreed. The misconception has probably arisen from a confusion of ideas connected with the fact that they undoubtedly (like children) prefer a firm rule, even if harsh, to a vacillating and inconsequent one.

These few notes have been put together in the hope that some readers of the JOURNAL may care to follow out some of the numerous lines of thought suggested by Mr. Dennett and Major Leonard, and supplement the above with their own views and experiences. No apology is therefore made for the very inadequate treatment which these two interesting volumes have met with, especially the second, from which the limitations of space will only allow us a single quotation.

"It must at least be evident to the European that it is quite impossible for him to judge and condemn people such as these are, by a system of law and ethics that is unable to cope with conditions and circumstances which lie outside the limit of civilised experience, and which, in consequence, are quite incomprehensible to him." (P. 196.)

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